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Voice of Minorities & Oppressed People in South Asian Societies



UN
WOMEN

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Must Be Heard!** p. 5



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Editorial

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed in September 2000, commits the world leaders to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. Dalit women stand at the lower most strata of the Indian society. They have to bear the triple burden of deprivation in terms of caste, gender and poverty. In a caste-divided society like India, health condition varies across social groups. According to the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, comparative analysis of Dalit and upper caste women's health outcome and access to healthcare services suggests that Dalit women records higher fertility and higher mortality as compared to the upper caste women. In this issue of Mino-View article on "UN women report" reveals these shocking facts that "The average age of death for Dalit women is 14.6 years younger than for higher caste women in India. According to that finding, the average age at death for Dalit women was 39.5 years against 54.1 years for higher-caste women. Increase and decrease in average age life span directly depends on the availability and access of health facilities to the population so in this context Working Paper 2015 "Status of Dalit women in India" by Indian Institute of Dalit Studies quoted Indian national family health survey which highlighted that 40 percent of Dalit women are under weight as compared to upper caste women whose underweight population is 29%. Data also suggests that 51 percent of upper caste women in India are anemic. Though anemia is prevalent across all social groups but Dalit women suffers the most. On average every three out of five Dalit women have anemia. Apart from this, access to health care facilities during and after pregnancy is not satisfactory for the Dalit women. Social group wise access to maternal and child health services reveal that large proportion (54%) of Dalit women records less than 3 Antenatal Care visits to any health personals during pregnancy. On the contrary only 36 percent upper caste women visited less than three times to the Antenatal Care centers. That's mean 64 percent upper caste women visited 3 or more than 3 times to Antenatal Care centre during pregnancy. The difference between Dalits and upper caste women is very high (18%). For the Post Natal Care after pregnancy the scenario shows no difference, on average every 3 Dalit women (37%) one has access to Post Natal Care facilities on the other hand every second (53%) upper caste women have the privilege of access to PNC facilities.

Progress of any society should be measured in terms of the degree of progress which women have achieved' as once said by Dr. Ambedkar. Progress of society will not be attained until the status of Dalit women improves in the Indian society. Unfortunately the condition of dalit women in India is not improving. They have been deprived from all kinds of human rights, education, income, dignity, and social status. This discrimination leads to anxiety and stress in Dalit women which in turn effect their health. Dalit women are routinely denied health services. The other factors which affect their earlier death are hunger, malnutrition, physical and mental torture, rape, insecurity and extreme expression of violence, exploitation and oppression against them. The main hurdle for India is the social group wise disparity in the access to healthcare facilities which should be addressed according to the international commitment.

Editor

An ex-Kamlari, a Dalit widow become state parliamentarian



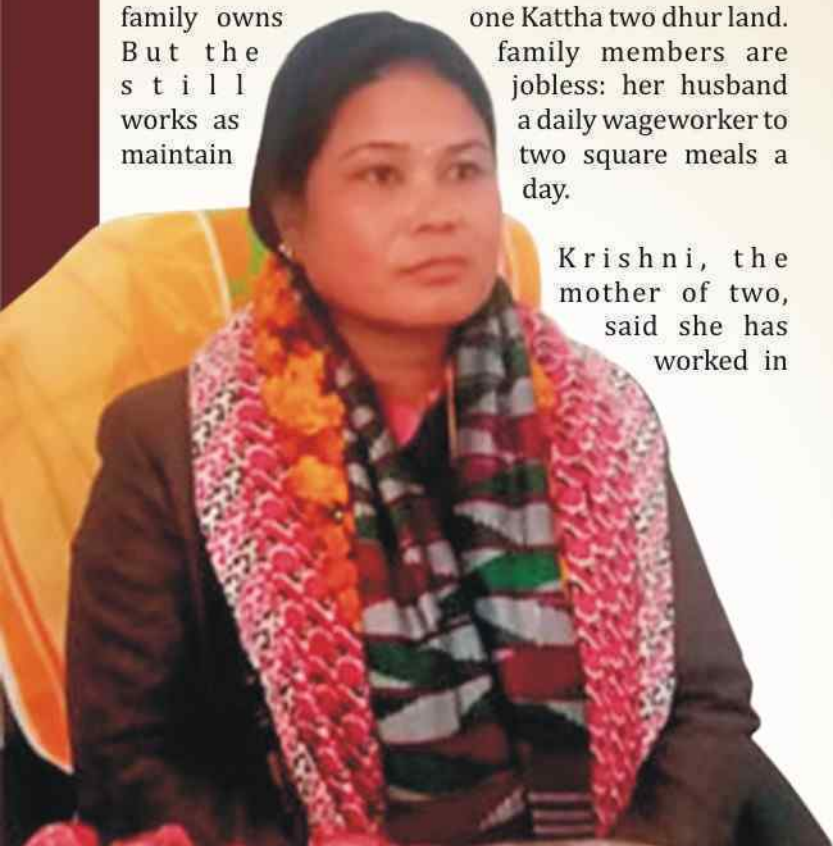
Jan 3, 2018-The recent selection of lawmakers from the marginalised communities under the Proportional Representation category has given a glimmer of hope for whole of the communities they represent.

Former Kamlari (indentured girl labourer) Krishna Chaudhary has been selected as a member of Provincial Assembly under the Proportional Representation category from the CPN-UML in Province 5.

Krishni, 42, of Sangharshanagar in Rajapur, Bardiya had worked as Kamlari for 17 years since her childhood. She got married to a Kamaiya (bonded labourer) man at the age of 15. "My husband and I had worked as domestic helpers. I did not have the opportunity to go to school," said Krishni, adding that she did not receive even a rupee while staying as Kamlari in her landlord's house.

"My father still has not received freed Kamaiya ID card nor have I received the card," said Krishni, whose family owns one Kattha two dhur land. But the family members are still jobless: her husband works as maintain a daily wageworker to two square meals a day.

Krishni, the mother of two, said she has worked in



various organisations, including the Kamlari Women Development Forum, for the upliftment of Kamlari women. An active member of the UML, she had run for the post of deputy mayor from Rajapur Municipality during the last local level election. However, she was defeated by the CPN (Maoist Centre) candidate Manakala Chaudhary by 3,000 votes.

Her community has been elated after she was selected as PR lawmaker of the Provincial Assembly. Krishni said she will be aiming at ending poverty and making people literate. "I will work to empower marginalised and impoverished people."

Elsewhere in Siraha, Phuliyadevi Sadaya Musahar of Dumari has become country's first woman lawmaker from the Dalit Musahar community after her party CPN (Maoist Centre) selected her as a member of the Provincial Assembly in Province 2.

"It came a big surprise to me. I could not believe at first when party leaders called me to congratulate on her success," said the 39-year-old.

Phuliyadevi's husband Mahendra, who had been operating underground during the war-era, died after an Improvised Exclusive Device went off accidentally as he was preparing the device at Sibanagar in the district in December 2005. "Our family endured many difficulties after the death of my husband. I have to take care of my mother-in-law and three children thereafter," she said.

Besides, she also started attending party programmes regularly, Phuliyadevi explained.

"The party recommended my name in the recent election. I didn't expect to be a lawmaker, but I am glad that the party has honoured a martyr's family," she said. As a provincial lawmaker, Phuliyadevi said, she would fight for ensuring proper shelter for the Musahar community.

According to the National Census of 2011, there are 234,490 Musahar people living in the Tarai.

Source: The Kathmandu Post



On average, a Dalit woman dies 14 years younger than one from upper caste: UN report

A woman's caste in India can increase her exposure to mortality as a result of factors such as poor sanitation and inadequate water supply and health care, says a UN women report. "The average age of death for Dalit women is 14.6 years younger than for higher caste women," states the report, Turning promises into action: gender equality in the 2030 Agenda, citing a finding from the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies in 2013.

According to that finding, the average age at death for

Dalit women was 39.5 years against 54.1 years for higher-caste women.

The report, covering 89 countries and released two-and-half years after the adoption of the UN's 2030 Agenda, "examines through a gender lens the progress and challenges in the implementation of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)".

About Dalit women in India, the UN report notes that the age at death is lower even when they experience



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similar mortality-related factors as higher-caste women.

“Even after accounting for social status differences, a gap of 5.48 years remains between the average age of death of higher caste women and Dalit women,” the UN report notes. “Further, the authors [of the 2013 study] applied the levels of mortality-related factors catalogued for higher caste women and found that there is still a gap between the life expectancy for higher caste women and Dalit women. A difference of 11.07 years remains even after attributing the Dalit social status coefficient to higher caste women. This means that life expectancy among Dalit women is 11 years lower than that of higher caste women despite experiencing identical social conditions like sanitation and drinking water.”

The report notes that in India, the “compounding effect of wealth and location also produces large inequalities”. For instance, a young woman aged 20-24 from a poor, rural household is 5.1 times as likely as one from a rich urban household to marry before the age of 18, 21.8 times as likely to have never attended school, 5.8 times as likely to become an adolescent mother, 1.3 times as likely to have no access to money for her own use and 2.3 times as likely to report she has no say in how money is spent.

“The likelihood of being poor is greater if she is landless and from a scheduled caste. Her low level of education and status in the social hierarchy will almost guarantee that if she works for pay, it will be under exploitative working conditions,” the report says.

It also notes that citizens can be effective data producers if engagement initiatives are set up. The report cites the examples of the Safecity initiative in India a platform that crowd-sources personal stories



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of sexual harassment and abuse in public spaces.

“Information on harassment incidents and their location is then made available to communities and local administrators to identify factors that cause this behaviour and inform strategies and policies aimed at finding solutions. The initiative has led to positive changes,” it noted, for instance, “the closure of public toilets in one neighbourhood in Delhi resulted in an uptick in assaults on women. Using this crowdsourced information, municipal authorities were able to link the increase in assaults to the closure, prompting the local authorities to reopen and maintain the toilets.”

The report says that in 89 countries with available data, women and girls account for 330 million of the poor. “This translates to 4 more women living on less than \$1.90 a day for every 100 men. The gender gap is particularly wide during the reproductive years,” it notes.

Further, it notes that “over 50 per cent of urban women and girls in developing countries live in

conditions where they lack at least one of the following: access to clean water, improved sanitation, durable housing, and sufficient living area.” It notes that “1 in 5 women under the age of 50 experiences physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the past 12 months.”

On discrimination, the report states: “The identities (perceived or inherent) of individuals and groups can increase their risks of discrimination and marginalisation. Those left furthest behind in society are often women and girls who experience multiple forms of disadvantage based on gender and other inequalities.”

Source: The Indian Express

Caste violence erupts in India over 200-year-old faultline

Security forces were out in full force in India's financial capital Mumbai this week, as members of the country's low-caste Dalit community demonstrated against alleged violence by right-wing Hindus. The unrest was concentrated in suburban areas on the outskirts of India's largest city, which also saw transport disruptions. There were also sporadic protests across the state of Maharashtra.

How did it start?

It all began when tens of thousands of Dalits, who rank at the bottom of India's ancient Hindu caste hierarchy, gathered in the village of Bhima Koregaon, 170 kilometers (105 miles) outside of Mumbai, on New Year's day to celebrate the 200th anniversary of a battle in which British colonial forces staffed with local Dalit fighters defeated a numerically superior army belonging to upper caste rulers of the region. In the years since, many Dalits have come to regard the battle as an important historical moment when their community stood up against oppressive higher caste Hindus. This year, Dalit activists claim that the annual commemoration was interrupted by right wing Hindu nationalists, who they say threw rocks at the gathering. The situation deteriorated as riots broke out and two men died in the chaos, according to local media.

What were they commemorating?

The battle between British-led forces and the local Indian rulers occurred during a period of British military expansionism in India. In this particular battle that is memorialized at Bhima Koregaon, 500 Dalit soldiers are said to have defeated 28,000 soldiers in the ruling army of the upper-castes. Every year, Dalits travel from across India to pay homage at the memorial in honor of the soldiers. The numbers may be debated, said Chandra Bhan Prasad, an independent researcher and writer on Dalit issues, but what is clear is that the

ruling army was much larger. Further, the anniversary of the battle at Bhima Koregaon is a historical moment of triumph for Dalits against people who they viewed as oppressors. Although the battle was fought for the British, it had a dual significance for the Dalit soldiers. "They were also fighting for their own dignity," Prasad said.

How does the caste system work?

In Hinduism's caste system, Dalits are traditionally at the bottom rung. Members of the higher caste sometimes consider them impure, and in certain places, they still aren't allowed to enter the homes or temples of the upper-caste community or share utensils with them. This practice, despite being unconstitutional, is still prevalent in parts of India, and Dalits continue to struggle with instances of discrimination, exclusion and violence. Decades of economic growth and rise of technology have led to Dalit empowerment, however, and Dalit political leaders and entrepreneurs are prominent today. In July 2017, Ram Nath Kovind, a member of the Dalit community, was elected India's 14th president. (India's first Dalit head of state was KR Narayanan, who was the country's President in the late 1990s.) But despite considerable advancement, there is still a long way to go.

What's the wider context?

Protest is part of a reaction to what activists claim is continued caste-based oppression and the rise of right-wing Hindu groups since the election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in 2014. One of the most prominent flare ups recently occurred in July 2016, when Dalits took to the streets to protest after a family of leather workers was reported to have been beaten up, flogged and paraded in a town in the western Indian state of Gujarat, after they were accused of skinning a dead cow. Traditionally, Dalits have done jobs like leatherwork because the work is considered impure by upper-caste Hindus. These protests speak of a collective anguish in this democracy that a significant faction continues to face this permanent discrimination and violence," said Dhruvo Jyoti, a journalist at the Hindustan Times who has worked on Dalit issues. "(They) were seen as a marker, that despite the Constitution, despite BR Ambedkar (a Dalit civil rights leader), despite all the strides that Dalits have made over all the generations, they continued to be oppressed."

Source: CNN



The Voice of Mahadalit Women Must Be Heard!

By: Manisha Mashaal

These are uncertain times where many in marginalized communities all over India are feeling anxious with the rise of atrocities and Brahminism around the country. Of all the people who are facing the brunt of these attacks, I speak as a Maha Dalit woman and can say our women are bearing the brunt of the violence and we must now find a way to lead our people away from it.

In this time when many in leadership are failing us, those of us who are on the front lines say enough is enough. We are the Maha Dalit Women's movement and we are here to change everything.

In Haryana where I am from this includes educated young girls, minor girls, and survivors of all ages who have now become leaders. We gave birth to this movement because no one else would center our experiences. This movement is led by Maha Dalit women and we work with women of all marginalized backgrounds but we will not be erased any more. Whether by government institutions or by cis-brahminical patriarchy we are seizing our time and will not be ignored.

This month we plan to launch our movement with a Haryana yatra that will raise our voices on the issues of caste, rape, violence, discrimination, Maha Dalit, transgender, Adivasi, and Muslim rights in Haryana.

Most importantly, we will be providing a platform for leadership of girls and women. However, while our march welcomes all women from all Dalit settlements our leadership is Mahadalit women. For our women don't even live in Dalit settlements we live outside the outcastes.

We are the daughters of the homeless who make huts from the waste of India's shining cities. And yet few know the names of our castes except only as a slur.

But we are Valmikis, Banghsi, Pakkis, Musahars, and Sikkaliars. And we are more than our caste profession we are the heart of all Dalit movements.

That is why we must have voice.



By breaking the boundaries of caste inside and outside of our communities we will take our stories and our voices through every street, every village, school, college, university, and household, and will provide a platform of equality for everyone.

Under the leadership of Mahadalit women, we hope Dalit movements can flourish from Haryana to open a new chapter of resistance and equality in Haryana.

We want to inspire a new way for people to think about how to live. Haryana is currently number one in terms of crimes against women. I am sick of this violence. Imagine if Haryana could be instead the foundation of change, respect and dignity for all women. This is our battle now.

How can we talk about developing Haryana, when not a single Maha Dalit woman has been consulted in what we want for our state? Who is this development for? Is the plan for Maha Dalit women to live on the outskirts of the future?

NO. We will not have it.

We believe our stories are the key to resistance. When we center our pain and our resilience we believe our existence holds the key to creating a real future for state, not just empty promises for the elite.

Our first concern is the epidemic of caste based sexual violence which has been going on with us for too long a time. In many places Khap Panchayats surveil and torment our Mahadalits and Dalit girls. These disgusting groups of dominant caste men sit around the

center of the village playing cards and harass the girls verbally. Worse, if a girl comes late or if she is alone, then she is likely to be abused and even raped with the consent of the Khap Panchayat or even by the members themselves.

We call out this terrible form of moral caste and gender policing and ask for Khap Panchayat structures to be abolished.

Our next concern is the violent political parties who push toxic dangerous narratives supporting the rise of Brahmanism. Political parties think that if our party is in power, then we can treat people in any manner we want, we can control them in whatever we want, we can behave cruelly and no one can say anything or no one can touch us. This is impunity and see its Saffron colors everywhere.

In our work we are particularly alarmed that since January 2018 we have seen an escalation of rapes and murders with young girls all over Haryana. These perpetrators often associated to a political party. And while these perpetrators publicly form committees of supporters and give promises of development, in reality they are creating a foundational rape culture. They prevent movements like ours to support survivors and instead defend the culprits.

Additionally we are seeing a rise of Mahadalits and Dalit women who are getting abused and raped at Brahminical institutions such as Hindu temples and associations. Caste Hindus people believe that sins get washed away at a temple.

This is the biggest joke for us. Because the Hindu temple continues to be source of biggest violence towards our people. We remember that Babasaheb said, "There is nothing that is going to change for us by going to a temple! It is only the place where Brahmins earns. Where we give away our money." We feel this truth deeply as we support these survivors. That is why We young Mahadalits and Dalits, will take all initiatives to uproot whatever type of blind faith propaganda our people are filled with by Brahminism and we will resist

it with all of our might.

For here in Haryana you can't predict when the trouble can come. Our battlegrounds are villages, buses, trains,



For here in Haryana you can't predict when the trouble can come. Our battlegrounds are villages, buses, trains, schools, fields, even the street. From Mirchpur to Rohtak our villages are stained with blood of our people and screams of our women. And even when survivors speak out the pressure by cops and panchayats to take a settlement or compromise with the perpetrators is high.

schools, fields, even the street. From Mirchpur to Rohtak our villages are stained with blood of our people and screams of our women. And even when survivors speak out the pressure by cops and panchayats to take a settlement or compromise with the perpetrators is high. They say, "Otherwise there will be no respect (ijjatkharaab ho jayegi) for you." And then they ask for a meagre apology from the offender.

For this is the truth it is better to be a Cow than its to be a Maha Dalit women. Cows are safe in Haryana, they even have a helpline and an N number of rapid protectors willing to kill in the streets to keep them safe.

But for us, there is nothing. This is the real status of development in Haryana. So as Maha Dalit Women we our standing on our Consitutional rights for dignity and self-respect and we fight not just for ourselves but we are fighting now for the Constitution itself!

So now given the present situation, the Mahadalit Womens Andolan is starting up in Haryana. And trust us when we say we need all of you. We have to come together now to protect innocents from death, to fight for our respect and justice socially and economically where women of Mahadalits, Dalit, Muslims and Adivasis are getting raped and abused. This movement is a battle for justice for all of us and we need all movements to end caste to stand with us!

In the end, we ask for your solidarity and support in this movement. We are learning and we hope to learn with you. Together we can create a future of power and dignity not just for Maha Dalit women but for all oppressed peoples in India.

Manisha Mashaal is a young dalit leader and activist from Haryana.



Devadasi practice - Forced Prostitution in the name of God

By: Manjula Pradeep



The origin of caste system is in Hindu religion and caste system has many manifestations. It has not only divided the society in to various layers of graded hierarchy but has also created inhuman practices in the name of God. One of it is Devadasi system prevalent in different forms all over India. The term Devadasi is a Sanskrit term denoting female servant of deity. But they are known by different names in different areas, such as 'Maharis'in Kerala,'Natis'in Assam, 'Basavis'in Karnataka, 'Bhavanis'in Goa 'Kudikar' on the West-Coast 'Bhogam - Vandhi' or 'Jogin' in Andhra Pradesh; Thevardiyar' in Tamil Nadu; 'Murali', 'Jogateen' and 'Aradhini' in Maharashtra. In Karnataka, old devadasis are called as 'Jogati' and young devadasis as 'Basavi'. The term 'Basavi' refers to feminine form of 'Basava' a bull, which roams the village at will without any restriction. This cult is prevalent even today throughout India with some regional variances.

When a girl is dedicated to or married not to a mortal-man but to an idol, deity or object of worship or to a temple, some rite is performed. The initiation ritual was said to include a "deflowering ceremony", known as "uditambuvad" in some parts, whereby the priests would have intercourse with every girl enrolled at his temple as part of his religious perks. A Marathi saying, "Devdaasi devachi bayako, sarya gavachi" ("Servant of god, but wife of the whole town"). Necklaces symbolise the bondage that defines devadasis girls from the lowest caste whose parents have given them to local goddesses or temples as human "offerings". She has to remain unmarried, and maintain herself by ceremonial begging, a system called "jogava" in Marathi, to get both

ends meet. With "chal" (a string of small bells) in her feet, she carries the "jag" (a metal mask of god) in a "pardi" (a basket) on her head and begs whole life, or ends up in a brothel. In Andhra Pradesh, the girls are married to the god Potharaju. In the Shimoga District of Karnataka, the girls are handed over to the goddess Renuka Devi, and in Hospet, to the goddess Hulganga Devi. In the Vijapur district of Karnataka, girls are given to the Monkey God (Hanuman, Maruti). Many girls in Karnataka are dedicated to the goddess Yellamma. In Maharashtra the female child is betrothed at birth to Khandoba,

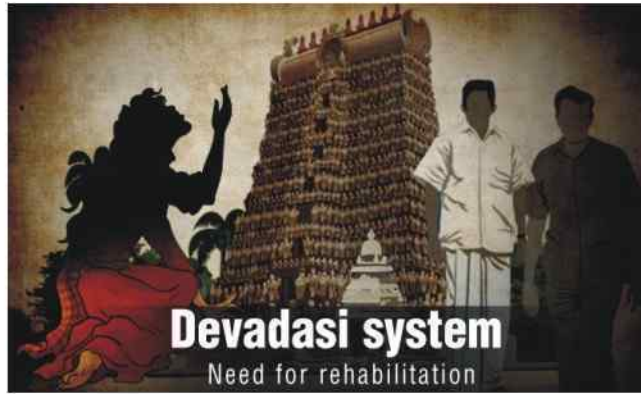
There are various myths around this inhuman practice. The Jogin system is based on the traditional belief in Andhra Pradesh that evil over the family or the village can be avoided by dedicating a girl in the family to be a Jogin. As soon as she reaches puberty, she becomes the exclusive concubine of the feudal gentry in the village. In Maharashtra, the poor deluded women promise to sacrifice their first -born daughters if Khandoba will make them mothers of many children. Then after the vow, the first - born girl is offered to Khandoba and set apart for him by tying a necklace of seven cowries around the little girl's neck.

When she becomes

o f marriageabl



age, she is formally married to Khandoba or dagger of Khandoba and become his nominal wife. Henceforth she is forbidden to become the wedded wife of any man. The parents of such girls do not feel ashamed to take her earnings. In Karnataka, there is a traditional belief that when there is famine, drought or epidemics, to appease gods



and goddesses a lower caste girl is dedicated to the local goddess Huligamma. The Banchara, Rajnat, Dommara and Bedia tribes in Madhya Pradesh also practice traditional prostitution. There has been influence of devdasi tradition on Muslim community as well. Some of the Muslim sects started offering girls to 'dargas'. Such girls were called 'acchutis'. There is a colony of such people in Lucknow in U.P. even today. The girl is married to the Koran. After the Nikah is performed, the girl is called as 'bibi' and is condemned to lead a life of prostitution.

Married to God before puberty, the devadasis, or Joginis, many of whom live in the temples, become sexual servants to the villages' upper-caste men after their first menstrual period. In some villages, the men who bought them keep Devadasis as concubines. In others, they are public chattels, who are used by men free of charge. Socially they are outcastes but they do suffer from severe venerable or sexually transmitted diseases from the men. AIDS also affects many of them. Majority of the Devadasis after they reach a certain age migrate to the towns where they enter in to the brothels and become prostitutes. The label of being a Devadasi is put on them. Just like caste, they cannot change their identity and have to live with it until their death.

Some of the states where the Devadasi practice is still going on tried to eradicate it through state laws like the Bombay Devadasis Prevention act, 1954, the Prohibition of Dedication act 1982 of Karnataka, the Andhra Pradesh Devadasis (Prohibition of dedication act, 1988. However, the practice lives on in the states in South India mainly in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu. Districts bordering Maharashtra and Karnataka are known as the "Devadasi belt"

According to the National commission on women of India it is estimated that around 2, 50,000 Dalit girls are dedicated as Devadasis to Yellamma and Khondaba temples in south India Maharashtra -Karnataka border. I have personally been to two village's one in Mehboobnagar district of Andhra Pradesh and another

in the Bellary district of Karnataka. In both the villages, I have found that there is a separate residential area allotted for the ex-Devadasis families, which is outside the village just like the Dalits, being segregated from the main village. However, the earlier is through the government rehabilitation program while

the later are the dominant castes. This shows the reflection of the caste system even the state machinery. All the families of ex-Devadasis are women-headed. There were some youth who were born through the sexual abuse of their mothers. We asked the children of ex-Devadasis "Do you go to school"? They said yes. Most of the children said that when they go to school the teachers and other children treat them badly. They are called as bastards. One of the ex-Devadasi told us that when they fill the school admission form for their children, they mention "God" in the column of father's name.

Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka Government have also allotted few acres of land to each Devadasi family. But the stigma attached to their identity cannot be removed through the rehabilitation program. The village communities are not ready to accept the ex-Devadasis families. In both of the villages the Devadasis through the support of the local Ngos organised themselves to form cooperatives. Through this, they have started income generating activities. Many strong ex Devadasis are fighting against the Devadasi practice. Most of them have become human rights activists. Very few of them were able to get married legally. Almost all of the ex-Devadasis have decided that they shall not follow this practice. They want their children especially girls to get good education or vocational training to live a much better life. The glimpse through the lives of Devadasis signifies their plight and suffering. In the present situation, what has come out is that until you do not suffer the pain you do not realise its intensity. When the Dalits took the leadership and started addressing their issues the outlook towards them has totally changed. After meeting the ex-Devadasi activists, I saw the anger of being subjugated in their voice, eyes and entire body. But it is a long way for them and if we cannot give them anything, then can we give them moral and emotional support?

Ms Manjula Pradeep has been involved in human rights work for the past two decades and is one of the foremost women leaders of the Dalit movement from Gujarat, India.

Religious and ethnic minorities are most persecuted in Bangladesh'



Bangladeshi minorities have been consistently denied their rights and evicted from their own land'

Ethnic and religious minorities are the most persecuted and oppressed people in Bangladesh, data collected by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has revealed.

NHRC Chairman Kazi Reazul Kabir said that although the constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens regardless of their religion and ethnicity, Bangladeshi minorities have been consistently denied their rights and evicted from their own land.

In its "Overall Summary of Investigation into the Eviction and Persecution of Minorities", the human rights body analyzed data from 2012 to 2017.

This included recorded instances of communal violence in Ramu in Cox's Bazar, Shanthia in Pabna, Nasirnagar in Brahmanbaria, Thakurpara in Rangpur, Langadu in Rangamati, Chandpur in Dinajpur.

"We have submitted the investigation reports on the communal violence. Our report details who was involved in the attacks but if no further step is taken by the government then these attacks will continue," the NHRC chairman said.

He was speaking as chief guest at a roundtable discussion on "World Human Rights vs the Security and Rights to Land of Religious Minorities and Indigenous People in Bangladesh" at the Center for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP).

The discussion was organized by the National Citizen Coordination Cell for the Enforcement of Vested Property Return Act, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), and the Urban and Kapaeeng Foundation.

In his keynote paper, Advocate Rana Dasgupta, the general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Oikya Parishad, said the Vested Property Act as the root of the land confiscation epidemic.

Rana Dasgupta said that through the Enemy (Vested)

Property Act, five million Hindus almost 40% of Hindu households in Bangladesh lost 2.6 million acres of land since independence.

"Around 10 million Hindus have already left Bangladesh since 1964, meaning some 632 Hindu people on average have been forced to leave the country every day due to law-induced discrimination," Rana said.

"If this trend continues then there will be no more Hindus in Bangladesh in 20 years."

Noted Economist, Prof Abul Barakat, said people are more apathetic to communal violence these days. "With this level of attack on minorities, it seems like Bangladesh is turning into Banglasthan," he said.

However, Prof Swapan Adnan, an eminent economist and researcher said land grabbers are not particularly interested in race or religion.

"They prey on those who are politically weak and have little protection from the state," he said. "Class-based or economic interest is always important in this regard while the characteristics are the same regardless of their dynamism."

Other speakers at programme included Rajshahi-2 constituency MP Fazle Hossain Badsha, ALRD Chairperson Khushi Kabir, and ALRD Executive Director Shamsul Huda.

The speakers at the programme demanded a Ministry for Minorities be instituted, along with a national minority commission a minority protection to ensure their rights.

They also demanded the CHT Land Dispute Settlement Commission Act to be implemented properly along with the government's declaration for implementing the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord.

The discussion was chaired by eminent human rights activist, Advocate Sultana Kamal.

Source: Dhaka Tribune

2.6 Million Dry Toilets and 13,384 Manual Scavengers: Do the Math

The law against manual scavenging can be successfully implemented if the State accepts that the practice of manual scavenging exists. ... What can be said with conviction and evidence is that the Government of India, both at the state and Centre, continues to violate their constitutional responsibility of implementing the law, and only pay lip service to empowering Dalit women....

The media has finally started to report on manual scavengers suffocating to death in sewage holes, but a story that continues to slip is the state's blatant neglect of home and community-based manual scavenging, 95 per cent of which is done by Dalit women. Manual scavenging is a caste-based division of labour handed down over generations of women, who are bound by this oppressive system to clean dry toilets of people living in their own villages or urban neighbourhoods.

Women married into families of this caste suffer the torture, mental and physical pain of this inhuman practice. They lift and carry heavy loads of excrement in cane baskets to designated sites of disposal. In the heat of summer and during the rains, the excrement leaks on to their faces and bodies. The stench and working conditions are unbearable. Their menfolk are expected to carry out other "polluting" tasks, including disposing of dead animals, cleaning



Now compare these dismal numbers with what the State reports on itself. According to the Census of India (2011), there are 7,94,390 dry latrines where humans clean excreta - 73 per cent of these are in rural areas whereas 27 per cent are in urban areas. Apart from these, there are 13,14,652 toilets where human excreta is flushed into open drains. A total of 26 lakhs [2.6 million] dry latrines exist in the country where the practice of manual scavenging still continues.



By: Ashif Shaikh

placentas after delivery, and various funeral-related activities. Despite hundreds of testimonies of subjugation, oppression, sexual harassment and marginalisation that these women have narrated to the State, many governments continue to prolong their state of denial.

After the long struggle of manual scavengers and people's movement, "The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013" was passed by the central government. The Act prohibits employment of manual scavengers, construction of insanitary latrines, and rehabilitation of manual scavengers with one-time cash assistance, scholarship for their children, and a residential plot with financial assistance for constructing a house. One of the important components of the law is identification of manual scavengers across the country through surveys. Up until October 2017, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has identified only 13,384 manual scavengers (4375 in urban and 9014 in rural) in 11 states of India. Of these, 12,640 received the one-time cash assistance (Rs 40,000) from the government and 4,643 received vocational training.

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reports on itself. According to the Census of India (2011), there are 7,94,390 dry latrines where humans clean excreta - 73 per cent of these are in rural areas whereas 27 per cent are in urban areas. Apart from these, there are 13,14,652 toilets where human excreta is flushed into open drains. A total of 26 lakhs [2.6 million] dry latrines exist in the country where the practice of manual scavenging still continues.

According to Socio-Economic and Caste Census (2011) of rural India, 1,80,657 rural households surveyed were engaged in manual scavenging. Highest numbers of manual scavengers were identified in the state of Maharashtra. Madhya Pradesh was second followed by Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, Karnataka, Punjab, Daman and Diu and Bihar. The same caste census reported that the states of Goa, Assam and Chandigarh had no manual scavengers. Manipur, Lakshwadeep and Himachal Pradesh had one. Delhi reported just six manual scavengers. Surveys and evidence collected by civil society organisations expose the rampant practise of manual scavenging in many of these states.

What can be said with conviction and evidence is that the Government of India, both at the state and Centre, continues to violate their constitutional responsibility of implementing the law, and only pay lip service to empowering Dalit women. The sole basis of the successful implementation of this law exists on the condition that the state accepts that the practise of manual scavenging exists and commits to the holistic rehabilitation of the community. The law depends on district collectors, municipal commissioners and taluk and panchayat chiefs to responsibly enumerate the number of manual scavengers still engaged in this inhuman practise.

This will mean, that these offices of authority will have to admit to their role in perpetuating the practise and

invest in sanitation systems that are free from human interface, which by itself is a very tall order. In most cases, the mandated district vigilance committees whose job it is to oversee the economic and social rehabilitation of manual scavengers, as well as monitor registration of offences (under the Act), their investigation and prosecution, have either not been formed or are dysfunctional. When formed, they exclude experienced civil society organisations and women.

The central government recently announced its plan to conduct a fresh survey in 164 districts of India. While this is a

welcome move, before embarking on this humongous exercise, it will be good to reflect and learn from the mistakes made in the last five years. First and foremost, there is a need to understand that eradication of this inhuman practise requires a change in the mindset of state officials who are responsible for its implementation. It requires a commitment to ensure that every woman and man engaged in this division of labour, not just receives a cheque of Rs 40,000, but are provided with rehabilitation that gives these families a real chance and the power to lead their lives with dignity. This includes free decent housing, relevant vocational training, financial assistance for self-employment opportunities and free education and scholarship for

the children of these families. If the government is able to identify all the women and men who till this date are victims of the caste-based oppression and provide them with alternate options, it will not only be empowering them, but also making amends for its own sinful history.

Ashif Shaikh is the Director, Jan Sahas & Member of Central Monitoring Committee, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The Committee is monitoring the Manual Scavenging Prohibition Law, 2013. The views expressed are his own.



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Source: Indian Express

Krishna Kumari becomes first Hindu Dalit woman senator of Pakistan



Ratna Bhagwandas Chawla was first Hindu woman to reach the upper house in Muslim-majority country

Krishna Kumari Kohli has become the first-ever Hindu Dalit woman to be elected to the upper house of Pakistan's parliament.

The election that took place on 3rd March 2018 saw the victory of 39-year-old Kohli who was nominated for a minority Senate seat from the Sindh Assembly by the Bilawal Bhutto Zardari-led Pakistan People's Party (PPP) last month.

Kohli, who comes from Nagarparkar village in Thar of the Sindh province, was born to a poor peasant family in 1979.

She and her family were held captive as bonded labourers for at least three years in a jail run by a landlord when Kohli was a child.

Married at the age of 16, Kumari pursued her education after her marriage, earning a postgraduate degree in sociology.

Krishna Kohli had joined the PPP as a social activist and actively worked for the rights of the marginalised communities of Thar.

Her brother Veerji Kohli, a noted human rights activist, especially of the marginalized communities in Sindh, a PPP leader and the elected Chairman of a Union Council from Nangarparker, was only released

yesterday after 11 months from Hyderabad prison on court orders.

Veerji was allegedly arrested on false charges.

The PPP in 2009 had elected the first non-Muslim Dalit Senator on a general seat. With Kohli becoming a Senator, the number of non-Muslims elected by the opposition party is now six, the highest minority representation in the upper house in the history of the Muslim-dominated country.



Kohli's forefathers were valiant fighters of the freedom struggle who waged a war against invading British forces in 1857.

She is also a human rights activist whose specialties involve women's rights, bonded labour, and sexual harassment at the workplace.

Kumari is the second Hindu woman to be nominated as a Senator in Pakistan. She has been nominated for the post by the Pakistan People's Party. Before her, the Pakistan Senate has had only one female Hindu member, Ratna Bhagwandas Chawla from the PPP, until now. Chawla represented the province of Sindh from 2006 to 2012.

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Source: Pakistan Daily

Rahul Gandhi's Zabardast Jhatka in Gujarat Election



By: Anand Teltumbde



Rahul Gandhi, the newly-anointed president of the Congress party, reacted to the results of the Gujarat assembly election 2017 saying that the polls had delivered the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) a zabardast jhatka (terrific shock), exposing Narendra Modi's credibility crisis (Times of India 2017). The Gujarat elections were no ordinary elections; they could be considered a prelude to the 2019 national election that beholds the palpable danger of India being formally transformed into a fascist Hindu rashtra if the BJP continues on its winning streak.

Gujarat offered the Congress a unique opportunity to win this election. It was the first Gujarat state election in 22 years that did not project Modi as the chief minister or show any credible face in his place. The anti-incumbency factor coupled with BJP's complacency and arrogance had put the ruling party on its backfoot. All the notable communities in the state (the Patidars under Hardik Patel's leadership, the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) under Alpesh Thakor, and the Dalits galvanised by Jignesh Mevani) had openly and vocally taken stands against the BJP. Farmers suffering from an aggravated agrarian crisis, youth facing rising unemployment, and traders and petty businesspersons (BJP's core constituency) agitated by demonetisation and the goods and services tax (GST) were also voicing their dissent. What more could the opposition have wished for? If, against all these odds, the BJP still won a comfortable majority in the assembly with an increased percentage of votes, one wonders what shock Gandhi was speaking of.

Congress's Competitive Deficit The polling percentage in Gujarat for this 2017 election was 68.3%, less than the 71.3% polled in 2012, signifying a decline in public enthusiasm. This is also highlighted by the huge number of votes polled for "none of the above" (NOTA). Over 5.52 lakh voters (1.8% of total votes) chose the NOTA option, far more than the 2.07 lakh and 1.85 lakh votes secured by the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) respectively, registering their silent dissent against the state of politics. Most commentators have commended the Congress for its performance as it got 16 more seats than

what it bagged five years ago. BJP's overall vote share plunged from 60.11% notched in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls to 49.1%, however, it rose from 47.85% in the 2012 assembly elections. Congress's vote share also rose to about 41.4% this time, up from 33% in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and from 38.9% in the 2012 assembly polls. The difference in vote share between them has also come down from 8.85% in 2012 to 7.7% this time, as it had from 10.4% in the assembly polls held immediately after the 2002 polls to 9.49% in the 2007 elections. Based on the Lok Sabha 2014 elections, in which the BJP had swept the polls with 60.11% votes, the BJP has lost in 66 assembly segments and the Congress that scored just 33.45% votes then, and zero seats, has won in 63 assembly segments. Thanks to India's first-past-the-post (FPTP) election system, despite increased vote share of 1.25%, BJP lost 17 seats. Congress, of course, gained 19 seats. Surely, Congress has done better than before but to what avail is the FPTP system?

This time, it had a unique and visible advantage. The Patidars or Patels, accounting for about 14% of the population and 25% members of legislative assembly (MLAs) in the previous assembly, have traditionally been a BJP-voting community. The community, deemed to be crucial in determining the results of about 65 of the total 182 assembly seats, were up in arms against the BJP on the issue of reservation. Simultaneously, however, they looked split in terms of voting; the rural population supported the Congress and urban voters still rooted for the BJP. While to some extent it was expected, the BJP certainly made a dent into the Hardik Patel-led Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti (PAAS) by buying off some of his comrades. The OBCs constituting 45%-50% of the total votes in Gujarat and influential in 71 seats, and hence especially favoured by Modi, had declaredly put their weight on the side of the Congress. Whereas Dalits, accounting for 7% of the population and traditionally Congress-voters, were openly against the BJP. The tribals, accounting for 14.75% population of the state, and influential in a total of 37 constituencies, have been divided between the BJP and the Congress. While all these communities cannot be assumed to vote in unison, they

were clearly leaning towards the Congress when the elections were declared. Still the Congress failed to beat the BJP among these communities. Out of 52 seats where the Patidar factor is 20% and more, BJP won 28, whereas Congress bagged only 23, one going to an independent. Among the Scheduled Castes, BJP won 8 and Congress only 5, including Mevani as independent whom it supported. Only among the Scheduled Tribes did the Congress win 16 as against 9 of the BJP. However, among the tribal-dominated seats, the BJP won 19 seats as against the Congress's 15, two seats going to the Bharatiya Tribal Party (BTP), and one to an independent.

Modi's Combating Prowess

The situation in Gujarat was such that without Modi, the BJP would have certainly lost the elections. Modi knew the importance of Gujarat in the run-up to the 2019 elections and went all out to win it forgetting the decency and decorum of the office he held. To start with, the elections were postponed to a convenient time through the pliant Election Commission of India. The convention of convening the winter session of Parliament was broken for the sake of it. Dodging the code of conduct, course correction on the GST front was effected to assuage angry voters. But with all this when Gujarat appeared to be slipping off his grip, he did not hesitate to stoop down to a new low of alleging a Pakistan-led conspiracy hatched along with the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, former Vice President Hamid Ansari, former Indian Army Chief Deepak Kapoor, four foreign secretaries and former Indian diplomats to Pakistan, as also some military analysts to influence the Gujarat elections. Even Rahul Gandhi's entry by someone in the register for non-Hindus at Somnath temple and Kapil Sibal's intervention on the Ayodhya case was used to tarnish the Congress, using his pet tactics to arouse the Hindus communally. There was not a word on the Gujarat model of development in the jingoist din around nationalism, which Modi had touted to fool the masses into voting him to power in 2014.

Modi easily swayed the urban voters to forget their demonetisation and GST woes and to give the BJP 42 out of 48 seats from Gujarat's cities. In a way, it was a repeat of the elections to urban local bodies that BJP had swept in early 2016. However, he could not impress the rural voters who have been suffering from deepening agricultural distress, and neglect by the ruling BJP that promoted crony capitalists in the state. It gave the Congress more than 50% of seats in rural and semi-urban areas, especially among its groundnut and cotton farmers. Congress's performance was most impressive in the Saurashtra region, where it swept the districts of Amreli, Morbi, Gir Somnath, and Surendranagar. The strength of PAAS in these areas itself was a manifestation of the agrarian distress. In the 182-member assembly, as many as 134 seats come from rural and semi-urban areas. Congress won 71 of them, followed by the BJP with 57 while two went to the BTP, one to the NCP and three to independents. In a way, it was also a repeat of the poll outcomes in district and taluka panchayats almost two years ago. As such, Modi's magic could be said to have worked only

to stem the worsening trend.

Gandhi's Ineffectual Show Rahul Gandhi had certainly taken the Gujarat elections seriously, spending 23 days and addressing over 65 rallies/ meetings across the state, churning out slightly better punchlines such as *vikas gando thayo chhe* (development has gone crazy), or *Shah-zada* (royal prince) as a potshot at Amit Shah's son. There were, however, a few silly ones too, for instance *Gabbar Singh Tax* (implying GST is vile) or *Abhishek Bachchan bhi dynast hai* (Abhishek Bachchan too is a dynast) in defence of his dynastic rise. But contrary to media assessment and praises from his sycophant supporters, he has again failed to measure up to his formidable adversary. The Congress is still showing ostrich-like signs, waiting for voters to get disillusioned with the BJP and refusing to see its own increasing irrelevance. Modi, besides his extraordinary oratorical and theatrical skills with which he dishes out half-truths and pure lies with dexterity and impresses Indian masses reared on hero worship, is also the choice of global capital. Gandhi, not endowed with any of these skills, simply cannot compete with him head-on. He must do a kind of SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat) analysis of not only his party but also himself, and come out with a viable strategy to stop Modi in his tracks. He does not reflect any such vision in the wake of repeated electoral losses his party has incurred or political understanding to sense the imminent danger facing the Congress. BJP's success is not entirely its own; it owes most of it to the ineptitude of the Congress. If Rajiv Gandhi had not reversed the Shah Bano judgment, or opened the locks of the Ram Lalla temple in Ayodhya, or Narasimha Rao had not allowed Hindutva marauders to assemble at the Babri Masjid, to recall recent history, Modi would not have reached where he has today. The rot runs deeper and can be traced back to the days of the making of the post colonial state under the brute majority of the Congress when it consecrated castes and religion into the Constitution. Even today, a majority of people do not favour the BJP; its 2014 popular vote being just 31%. Despite the knowledge of its past sins, nearly all progressive people of India backed the Congress electorally just to prevent the BJP from realising its diabolic goal. But Gandhi would frustrate them with his confused conduct. He played into Modi's trap and visited 27 Hindu temples in Gujarat and also claimed that he was a *janevu-wearing Brahmin*, not only exhibiting so-called "soft Hindutva" but also flaunting casteist notions that could easily alienate the lower castes, particularly Dalits. Why could he not claim like the Mahatma Gandhi that he was a *Bhangi* by choice for being a Hindu? Congress's strategic bankruptcy lies in its imagination that Gandhi can defeat the BJP with his Hinduness and Brahminhood, instead unwittingly legitimising BJP's politics as his predecessors have done. Unfortunately, within the available time window, people do not have any recourse other than relying on him to save India from becoming fascist.

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Untouchability high in urban UP & Rajasthan, even Delhi

Rajasthan untouchability, UP untouchability, untouchability in India, Rural India, untouchability, india untouchables, india news, indian express news Untouchability appears to be practised more by women as close to two-thirds of women respondents have confessed to 'self or family member' practising untouchability in rural Rajasthan. A new survey on social attitudes in the country indicates that close to two-thirds of the population in rural Rajasthan and rural Uttar Pradesh still practice untouchability and almost half the population in the same area is also opposed to Dalit and non-Dalit Hindu inter-marriages.

Despite decades-old-laws criminalising untouchability, it appears to be practised more by women as close to two-thirds of women respondents have confessed to "self or family member" practising untouchability in rural Rajasthan (66 per cent) and rural Uttar Pradesh (64 per cent). According to the survey, 50 per cent of respondents in urban Rajasthan admitted to practising untouchability as did 48 per cent of respondents in urban UP and even 39 per cent of Delhi. The survey, Social Attitude Research, India (SARI), which was conducted through representative phone surveys in 2016 in Delhi, Mumbai, Rajasthan and UP, focusses on discrimination against Dalits and women. A total of 8,065 people (men and women) were interviewed for the survey - a paper based on the survey has been published January 6 in the Economic and Political Weekly.

Conducted by the University of Texas, the Research Institute for Compassionate Economics, and Jawaharlal Nehru University, the survey sheds light on "explicit prejudice" and reveals attitudes that have been hard to grapple with. On Dalits and non-Dalit Hindus and inter-marriages, the range of responses, according to the survey, vary between 60 per cent in rural Rajasthan and 40 per cent in UP, being opposed to inter-caste marriages. The respondents also favoured a law which would prohibit inter-caste marriages. Diane Coffey, at the University of Texas in Austin, finds this surprising and the range "narrow", as on an average the Delhi respondents have had five years of more education and education is seen as a "liberalising force".

The surveyors consist of Coffey, Payal Hathi and Nidhi Khurana affiliated to the Research Institute for Compassionate Economics, and Amit Thorat, with the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. The team of surveyors have also made a comparative assessment with surveys on these deeply personal but important social attitudes, with those between blacks and whites in the US, forty five years ago and they find some parallels. They point out that fewer White adults in the US supported laws against marriages

between Blacks and Whites between 1972 and 2002 than Indians who supported laws against inter-caste marriages now.

India's Special Marriage Act in 1954 made inter-caste and inter-faith marriages legal, and the idea that there would be a civil marriage recognised by the state allowing inter-caste unions, was meant to deal a death blow to the caste system (held up essentially by endogamy). But in the US, it was only in 1967 that the Supreme Court there declared inter-race weddings as legal across the country. "These trends are indeed quite worrying. While they do not bode well for the long-term growth of the economy and development of society at large, they also in many ways indicate a worsening of the social mindset, calling for thinking of smarter ways of intervention via policy," Thorat said. The survey also has results on significant attitudes towards women. Nearly half the persons interviewed disapproved of women working outside homes, indicating that social stigma for working women is still high. (Female participation in the labour force at 27 per cent by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) placed India at a rank lower than 170 among 188 countries). On eating last at home, 60 per cent of women in rural UP say they eat at the end, and about one-third in Delhi reported the same - this has implications on the health of women and low body weight.

Coffey told The Indian Express; "The most startling thing about the data is just how big the numbers are. Too often, people who look towards a modern future dismiss casteism or patriarchy as a thing of the past and instances of discrimination as meaningless, isolated anecdotes. What these big numbers reveal is that prejudice remains very common too common. And that means that life could be a lot better for a lot of people: for Dalits, for women, and for everyone touched by an unequal society."

Coffey said that this establishes why social inequality must be a priority for policy-makers. "What stands out about these numbers is that they are representative. Representative surveys tell us what is true on average about a population. So, these numbers tell us about what is true on average for adults in these states. If we are honest with ourselves, we already know that discrimination persists. But it can be hard for policy-makers to take on the evidence from daily experience that is right under their noses. Representative numbers make it undeniable that social inequality is a policy priority."

Source: The Indian Express



Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation